

The Honorable James Marleau
Chair, Senate Committee on Health Policy
Michigan Senate
P.O. Box 30036, Lansing, MI 48909

May 7th, 2014

Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

I write to you today as I recover from my latest surgery, my fifth, as a result of my breast cancer diagnosis at 24 years of age. It was my hope that I would be well enough to join you in person to testify. However, as that is not possible, I will share with you my words, which I believe to be even more powerful.

By means of introduction, I am an aide in Senator Darwin Booher's office. Last year, at the age of 24, I was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of breast cancer, Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, after finding a lump in my breast. Two weeks after my diagnosis, I underwent my first mastectomy to remove the cancer. Following a grueling round of fertility treatments to save my chances of having children, I had another surgery, this time to implant a port in my chest before chemotherapy began. Two weeks later, I sat in a chair and watched the poison drip slowly into my body. The next five months of my life were the hardest I will hopefully ever encounter. Chemotherapy takes everything from one's body and sometimes even threatens to take your very light. After my blood work had risen to non-threatening numbers, I underwent a second, preventative mastectomy. At that time, I also had breast expanders placed under my chest muscles and sewn to my ribcage. This was the first step of a long reconstruction. Following three months of painful expansion, this past Friday, May 2nd, they removed the expanders and replaced them with soft implants.

I share all of this with you because it is my sincere hope and goal as a survivor to discredit two of the arguments brought forth against this life-saving legislation. The first is that this verbiage is "inconvenient" for those in the medical system. This verbiage may cause unnecessary testing to be done and unnecessary time to be spent on benign tissue.

Let me share with you all what is inconvenient: Having your breasts removed from your body, having your hair fall out in droves, having your body feel withered and old and having this cancer threaten your chance of ever conceiving. THESE are inconvenient things. Verbiage added to testing that could save you from these things, that is what one would call life saving.

Another argument shared today is that this verbiage could instill fear or cause "a scare factor." Let me share with you what is scary: Being diagnosed with cancer when it has progressed, being told it has metastasized into other parts of your body. Scary is dying from cancer. THESE are scary things. Verbiage that could save women from ever experiencing these tragedies, that is what one would call life saving.

I sincerely pray today, Honorable Chair and Senators, that you will choose the words **life saving** and ignore the words “inconvenient” and “scare factor”.

Take this important step toward saving lives, *like mine*.

Sincerely,

Emmy Pontz